

Machiavelli at 550—Reflections on his contribution to management, marketing, and public affairs

With the U.K. Elections upon us and manoeuvring for the U.S. Presidential Elections in November 2020 already started, it is time to reflect on power. It is always good to call upon Machiavelli to help make sense of the issues and people in the political arena. It is 550 years since Niccolo Machiavelli was born in Florence in 1469 of a very old Tuscan family. The young Machiavelli had a vigorous humanist education, was taught Latin by good teachers, and had access to the best of classical history and ideas. Little is known about the rest of his life until at the surprisingly young age of 29 in 1498, he was recognised by the Signory for his administrative talents and was elected to the responsible post of Chancellor of the Second Chancery. He is also given duties in the Council of the Ten of Liberty and Peace (formerly Ten of War), which dealt with Florentine foreign affairs.

During his time in office, his journeys included missions to Louis XII and to the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian in Austria; he was with Cesare Borgia in the Romagna; and after watching the Papal election of 1503, he accompanied the newly elected Pope, Julius II, on his first campaign of conquest against Perugia and Bologna. In 1507, as a Chancellor of the recently appointed Nove di Milizia, he organised an infantry force, which fought at the capture of Pisa in 1509. Three years later, this force was defeated by the Holy League at Prato and the Medici returned to power in Florence. Machiavelli was almost immediately excluded from public life as a previous holder of high office under the former republican regime, where he had built up a number of powerful enemies who were determined he should not retain his post.

After being falsely implicated in a plot against the Medici, he is imprisoned in the Bargello and hideously tortured. He maintains his innocence and is eventually granted an amnesty on the election of the new pope, Leo X, (Cardinal dei Medici) and retires to his farm six miles away from Florence just outside San Casiano, where he lives with his wife and six children and concentrates on study and writing. For much of the rest of his life, his movements are restricted by one regime or another because of his past. He desperately wants to return to government service to serve Florence and his countrymen, "If only to roll stones" (Letters to Vettori) but never regains public office. At 43, Machiavelli's public career had ended, but his work as a writer, for which he is celebrated, was just beginning.

He wrote *The Prince* in just a few months in 1513, in which he attacks “the writers” whose inconsistent moralism allows them to admire great deeds but not the cruel acts necessary to accomplish them. *The Prince* was never published during its author's lifetime, and although circulating quite widely in manuscript form, it seems to have caused little if any controversy during Machiavelli's life. In 1532, 5 years after Machiavelli's death, it was published in Rome. In 1559, all of Machiavelli's works are condemned and placed on the Papal Index.

It is his continuing reputation and the influence of *The Prince* which has resulted in the use of the Machiavellian theme by management commentators such as Jay (1967), Calhoun (1969), Shea (1988), Curry (1995), McAlpine (1992 and 1997), Harris, Lock, and Rees (2000), and Harris (2013).

We will be hosting a major symposium on Machiavelli's contribution to leadership, management and understanding power in September 2020 in Italy in 2020, and we would welcome potential contributions from authors for this event as we reflect on his great works and development of political leadership and management knowledge. Expressions of interest and ideas for the symposium would be most welcome.

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